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ABSTRACT

In 1988, the East Baton Rouge (Louisiana) Parish School System implemented an education reform plan to reduce mandatory busing by offering a controlled choice plan allowing educational options. Two years later, parent and community involvement in schools has improved and white enrollment has increased. To understand why a few schools have had limited success at attracting students outside their attendance zones, a study was conducted to identify selection factors important to parents. Following an extensive overview of desegregation efforts and their relationship to choice alternatives, research findings concerning the current choice debate and parental choice issues are summarized. The study of parental choice influences used a stratified sample of 8 pilot and 8 nonpilot schools with an enrollment totalling 9,000 students. The survey asked respondents to rank eight indicators of school choice (location, school policy, reputation, leadership, distance, physical facilities, extracurricular activities, and school program) from most important to least important. Open-ended questions were also included. Results showed the primary parental choice factors to be location in relation to homes, a school's "face value" or public perception, and leadership and staff abilities and qualifications. Racial composition was only occasionally mentioned. A sample survey is attached. (28 references) (MLH)

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EXAMINING PARENT SELECTION IN THE EAST BATON ROUGE CONTROLLED CHOICE PLAN

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Examining Parent Selection in the East Baton Rouge Controlled Choice Plan

PURPOSE

In 1988, the East Baton Rouge Parish School System implemented a plan for educational reform under the direction of newly appointed superintendent, Dr. Bernard Weiss. Included in the plan's outline is a strategy that reduces mandatory busing by offering a controlled choice plan that allows for educational options. Faced with a continually declining white enrollment, administrators hoped to regain the trust and participation of families and local agencies who no longer supported the efforts of public education.

After two years of implementation, there has been some progress and substantial change. Parent and community involvement in schools have improved and white enrollment has increased. Participation in the controlled choice plan continues to grow as schools are added to the program. However, a few schools have had little or no success at attracting students who reside outside of their own attendance zone. The administration recognizes that in order to continue the proposed reform, it must empower all schools to attract students. In order to do that, an understanding of how parents select schools for their children is essential. The purpose of this study was to identify factors that were important to parents in the school selection process.

OVERVIEW

It's a matter of choice--and that should come as no surprise to anyone in a society where the freedom to choose is inherent to the democratic way of life. After many years of busing and mandatory reassignment that has left much to be resolved, the American public longs for the freedom to choose the schools that its children attend. In addition, parents and local agencies are demanding the right to diversify curriculums and policy that provide variety in education climates (Rossell, 1988; Elam, 1989).

Local control has been a dominant feature throughout the history of public education. However, as schools have become a component of many important social interventions, educational issues have occupied a larger portion of the agenda for federal agencies and state legislations. Federal involvement is largely due to efforts aimed at establishing equitable funding strategies, providing special assistance to targeted populations and eradicating racial isolation. However, these policies have reduced the traditional decision-making ability of local educational agencies and parents (French, 1979; Kirst, 1984).

The desegregation of schools is one of the issues that encouraged increased participation of the federal government. It has been one of the more difficult goals to achieve because of its disfavor with local governments and parents who are forced to bus students, relocate teachers, reassign principals and rezone residential assignments. East Baton Rouge Parish is one of many districts which has been gravely impacted by a long-standing

federal court order to establish a unitary system.

Policy makers recognize the need for parent support and involvement and, yet, must consider issues of equity and desegregation that do not often appear attractive to some parents. Local agencies and parents want to recapture some of the authority lost to federal and state government, but become indignant and frustrated by accountability and equity measures.

The future of education seems to lie somewhere in the compromise of everyone involved. There are presently, many systems (Boston, Mass.; Minnesota; Seattle, Oregon; Washington; Prince George, Md.; South Dakota) which have implemented some variation of a controlled choice plan. Most have opted to include only public schools and many are required to restrict transfers based on desegregation criteria. Although total success cannot be reported, educational choice is a popular issue with parents (Lewis, 1987; Kerchner, 1988). A key to future planning will mesh parent concerns and policy makers' responsibilities into a workable model.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The early visionaries of the American democracy perceived the need for a common educational experience. This appeared particularly important to the development of a cohesion made necessary by citizens whose native languages, cultures and ancestery were quite diverse. Levin (1983) provides a clear definition of the common educational experience as one which taught students three major concepts: 1) the nation is one of laws which

entails rights and obligations of its citizens, 2) a common language is necessary to provide a vehicle for social, cultural and commercial intercourse and 3) modern capitalism demands that citizens understand work relationships, work organizations and property rights. Many still recognize the need for the benefits that have been and continue to be obtained from the public schools' common school provisions.

Choice in education, however, is not a new concept. Levin explains diversity as established by local control in this way, "[d]emocratic localism meant that hiring patterns, curriculum, religious practices, political content and values represented rather heavily those of the surrounding community..." (p. 21). In addition to strong parent support for choice in education, the judicial system has tended to favor with parents, disregarding the effect alternative programs might have on uniformity and equity. As early as 1922, an act which tried to limit the use of private institutions was struck down in the case of Pierce vs. Society of Sisters. The court proclaimed that the limitation "unreasonably interfered with the liberty of parents and guardians to direct the upbringing and education of children under their control" (James, 1983, p. 57).

Institutional alternatives have historically been choices available only to affluent families. Private schools, such as those established through churches, remain attractive to those who can afford the tuition fee. Many public schools face serious problems with drugs, vandalism and discipline which discourage

attendance of those who can afford to choose a setting perceived to have "religious and moral overtones" (Ornstein, 1989, p. 73). This preference supports Levin's contention that local control and school choice are often used to establish schools that reinforce the values and beliefs of individuals, at the risk of some of the overall social benefits obtained by common schools (Levin, 1983).

Levin points out that in a market environment, consumers choose alternatives in one of two ways: consumers may "exit" by selecting from one provider to another or they may use "voice" to protest, bargain or negotiate a more palatable agreement. Related to education, finance and governance have provided the opportunities for choice (1983, p. 21).

Although private schools will play a pivotal role in school choice legislation, this study will be concerned only with public education choice programs. The following table outlines the development of inter- and intra-district school choice:

TABLE 1.
Types of Choice Programs Used in Public Education

Program	Characteristics
Alternative School	A distinct and identifiable unit for administration of personnel and program Strong emphasis on school climate Designed to respond to needs, desires or interests not addressed in other schools.
Magnet School	Voluntary district wide access Curricular theme that is distinct and appeals to students Designed specifically to integrate students
Open Enrollment	Serving as a "voucher method," such programs allow students to attend public schools in the district of their choosing State supports education of students at the school they choose to attend Eliminates voucher argument against possible use of public funds in religious schools

Source: Education USA, Special Report (1985)

The Alternative School Concept

Various forms of alternative school programs evolved during the turbulent protest years of the 1960's. The common educational experience appeared too narrow and restrictive. Traditional schools were labeled as "cold, dehumanizing, irrelevant institutions" (Raywid, 1989). Parents cried out for programs which offered diverse learning experiences that allowed for individual learning needs and styles.

Many alternative programs were shortlived due to "fiscal retrenchment and consolidation of underenrolled schools (Chenoweth, 1989, p. 93). One alternative school plan that has survived through various reforms and school initiatives is the San Francisco project proposed by Superintendent Robert Alioto in 1978. The organizational redesign of San Francisco schools included adding an additional seven elementary alternative schools to four previously existing ones. Pronounced as "Superintendent Alioto's most significant endeavor and victory during his ten year tenure," (Chenoweth, p. 95) the schools established by the redesign are so popular that people camp out for days for the ooportunity to enroll their children in the programs offered by them.

Superintendent Alioto's plan provided for marketing the redesigned alternative schools to the public as programs that are "philosophically and instructionally distinctive (p. 97). The first director of the alternative schools, Gerson Rosenberg proposed that the real success in the alternative schools was founded in the way they made parents feel when given school

attendance options. He believed that they differed very little in the educational programs offered. He perceived that the public sentiment for alternative schools was not based on their substantive offerings, rather "the alternative school myth continues and has not been destroyed because emotion creates belief" (p. 102).

Chenoweth believes that strategic packaging and attractive labeling of alternative schools provides for sites that are more symbolically distinct than substantively so. Although these characteristics provide only a pseudo alternative education, the public has continued to place a high demand on their offering. This is, in part, attributed to the alternative schools' ability to decouple from the school district. Chenoweth acknowledges that "as long as alternative schools symbolize choice or options and have timely labeling such as 'open' and 'traditional' or 'academic' they will attract customers.

Magnet School Development

Although many alternative school experiments failed due to funding difficulties and insignificant gains in student outcomes (Education USA, Special Report), the alternative concept gained new life amid court-ordered desegregation in large districts. Faced with the loss of large numbers of white students who refused to be mandatorily assigned to predominantly black schools, magnet schools were designed. These schools were developed in an attempt to attract white students to minority schools with distinct and unique programs. The research on magnet school effectiveness is limited.

However, some studies have explored how well magnet schools have encouraged voluntary attendance in minority locations and tried to determine factors that influence their "attractiveness."

Christine Rossell's study (1985) of Boston magnet schools outlined several features that she believed impacted school success for attracting white students. Written in the form of policy recommendations, Rossell proposed that the following school characteristics influenced the success of magnet programs:

1. Whites will not enroll in schools perceived as predominantly black. Schools in black neighborhoods should be publicized to be predominantly white. "The enrollment process should be closely controlled so that this occurs and is maintained in subsequent years" (p. 9).

2. Social class influences attitudes about "educational values and preferences that might interact with the more well known racial attitudes" (p. 9).

3. Schools have a greater chance to attract majority or minority students by carefully selecting the principal and staff. "Isolated minority neighborhoods should have popular white principals and teachers (but no more of the latter than is necessary to have a racially balanced staff). The reverse is true for schools in predominantly white neighborhoods that are seeking to attract minority students.

4. Low teacher-pupil ratios make magnet schools more attractive.

5. The physical appearance of a school is much more important if it is less attractive because of location or other factors.

6. Distance is an important factor in voluntary programs. "Magnets should be strategically placed to minimize busing distances" (p. 16).

Blank (1986) believes that a renewed interest in magnet schools has resulted from community and parent desires to be

involved in educational planning and decision making. His study, and others, also found that planned marketing strategies by magnet schools had the potential to produce higher levels of community and parent participation (Levine, 1980; Willie and Greenblatt, 1981; Blank et.al, 1983). Blank (1983) concludes from the data that "marketing activities can increase the level of information about the schools and develop a 'consumer approach' to school selection" (p. 277).

Interdistrict Choice

Some studies of voluntary desegregation programs suggest that they include interdistrict stategies (Hentschke, et. al., 1985). Hentschke proposes that this will be necessary in many urban areas as the proportion of minority students grows "to the extent that entire districts have become racially identifiable" (p. 150). The authors believe that when this occurs that costs should be absorbed by the state and federal governments.

Hentschke's emphasis on desegregation litigants' mistrust associated with voluntary programs, perceived as delaying tactics rather than real solutions, suggests that voluntary programs will require careful monitoring and longitudinal tracking of racial composition in order to avoid defeat of programs based on this argument. The authors promote choice programs, however, founded in the belief that mandatory plans have failed to successfully eradicate racially isolated schools. They believe that "urban school districts that are becoming more segregated and that have high proportions of minority populations, cannot achieve a

signficant degree of desegregation without the incorporation of suburban school districts" (p. 161).

Public School Voucher Plans

The choice argument becomes most heated when the discussion of educational vouchers is raised. Some proponents of choice believe that dollars should follow students. Viewing the present system of education as a "centralized bureaucracy that prides itself on uniformity and impersonality" (27), Denis Doyle and Chester Finn Jr. (1983) argue that a voucher system would "contribute to the enhancement of parental choice and the opportunity to create more educational diversity without sacrificing equality" (27).

In Minnesota, the Perpich plan outlined a proposal for use of vouchers, exclusive to public schools. Even with the restrictions, the bill drew debate and was not passed initially. Those opposed to the plan argued that it benefited higher-income families diproportionately since they were better able to afford transportation costs, making them more likely to participate. They also felt that it was detrimental to families and student welfare for children to travel long distances to schools (Education USA, Special Report, p. 29).

In 1988 Rudy Perpich, newly elected as governor, signed the bill that began a two year phase-in of an open enrollment plan made available to all students in Minnesota's 435 public school districts (Sandler and Kapel, 1988). The program is a public school form of the voucher concept since state aid is attached to

enrollment. This could mean substantial losses to districts that lose students to other districts. The verdict is still out on the outcome benefits and/or detriments created by the plan. Nathan (1989) provides supportive arguments while others are convinced that negative consequences are being overlooked.

A few states have enacted legislation related to voucher systems of one kind or another, despite the campaign against them. South Dakota's variation on a voucher system provides transportation funding for student transfers from small rural schools to other districts (Education USA, Special Report).

THE CURRENT DEBATE SURROUNDING CHOICE

The more recent efforts to promote choice do not necessarily center on the issues of effective desegregation or fund dispersement. Proponents of present parental choice plans predict that they will reform education and restore public support of schools while developing incentives for elevating educational quality.

Milton Womack (1989), a strong supporter of choice in education in Louisiana, believes that competition between schools is one of the keys to their improvement. In a recent Sunday Advocate article Womack declared that "[c]hoice and competition are not the panacea for the educational malaise we have in this country. Choice and competition will provide the incentive for improvement. Schools will improve or go out of business, and they should" (p. 9B). Womack does not include any empirical evidence to support his statement, although he continues to lobby the

Louisiana legislature to implement a voucher system. Sandler and Kapel (1988) note that the research related to voucher plans is extremely limited and investigations of experiments such as the public school voucher plan of Alum Rock provided little substantiating evidence for school improvement related to choice.

Kerchner (1988) proposes that the concept of choice "legitimates the authority of ownership" (p. 387). Parents and students benefit from the diversity of curriculum and structure as they choose programs that are most appropriate and/or appealing to them. School staff are given some flexibility in the utilization of resources, as long as they continue to attract and hold clients. However, Kerchner also suggests that as some schools become more vulnerable in a "market" environment (through disorganization, lack of attractive features resulting in loss of students), others become more selective in the clientele they choose to serve. Schools might begin to eliminate or deny entry to students and parents who create dissension or controversy.

Research by Darling-Hammond and Kirby (1985) found that many parents do not make active choices when given the opportunity. They simply send their children to the school that is closest to their home. When parents did make active choices, situational and convenience factors were important in their decision of school assignment, along with the quality of education provided at the site.

Joe Nathan (1989), a strong advocate for choice plans, highlights the success stories of the Minnesota experience to

demonstrate the positive effects that choice plans can have on education. He points out that the postsecondary program offered through choice enrollment has drawn over 12,000 students that are making grades that are "as high or higher than those of college freshmen in rigorous courses at postsecondary institutions" (p. 24).

Nathan cites a Minnesota Department of Education survey that found that all (100%) of non-graduating students and their parents planned to enroll in the Options Program the following year. Nathan continues by reporting that 90% of parent respondents believe that their children are learning more and 95% reported to be satisfied or very satisfied.

Mary Ann Raywid's research of choice plans reports encouraging findings. Citing over 100 studies, she concludes that "when families have the opportunity to select among different kinds of public schools, students' academic achievement and attitudes improve" (Nathan, 1989, p. 24). She also found parental support to be increased by choice plans.

Opponents, or skeptics, argue that choice plans can be detrimental to educational improvement and desegregation efforts. Scott Thomson (1989) has cautioned that transfers to schools are sometimes based on ill-advised choices such as athletic program eligibility or softer standards. Ann Bastian (1989) is concerned, as well, that self-selection may lead to some disastrous results, such as resegregation and inequitable schools. Her argument that choice is a "double-edged tool" (p. 56) includes the following

considerations for implementing effective choice prgrams:

1. Equity should not be sacrificed.
2. School improvement ultimately must address the real problems in schools.
3. Parents must be involved and have access to information.
4. Teacher empowerment must be considered.
5. Assessment of schools will have to be carefully planned.
6. A changing community accountability will have to be established.
7. Funding will have to be provided for implementation.

A New Role For Parents

Literature and empirical findings related to parental choice appear to be limited to a few authors and systems (Nathan, 1989; Raywid, 1989; Thomson, 1989; Rossell, 1989) and parents' perceptions and attitudes about specific choice influences seem unclear. Charles Glenn (1989) recommends that future research include more parent surveys developed for the purpose of identifying desirable school qualities. He suggests that this is not often done because parents are perceived as being less equipped with the facts than professional educators and are often too easily persuaded to go with the newest educational trends. Even if this is true, parent opinion provides essential information regarding the aspects of schooling that are most attractive to them.

Choice plans magnify the fact that some schools are more popular and desirable than others. In order for systems to assist less attractive schools with improvement plans, administrations must know, specifically, how parents make choices and devise action

The system chose to implement the plan over a four to five year period, pending approval of the federal court. The first cycle, school year 1987-88, involved 12 schools, each creating a School Advisory Council (SAC) that reflected a racially balanced representation of parents, teachers and community members and an Action Plan that outlined school goals for improvement and curriculum enhancement.

In 1989, an additional 31 schools were initiated into the program, each with SAC's and Action Plans approved by an Oversight Committee. A variety of programs were developed and marketed to the public including those for extended day, Montessori, Attention Deficit Disorder and Dyslexia. Additionally, postsecondary school courses, computer labs, academic/athletic partnerships, and others which focused on particular content area skills completed the vast array of offerings.

Studies indicate that parent response to Redesign is favorable. White enrollment was slightly greater than the previous year (approximately 700 students), the majority of them enrolling in pilot schools. The index of interracial exposure increased one percentage point (Smw=.29), the first time in five years in which this figure did not decline (Table II). This index has been used by other districts (Rossell and Glenn, 1989) in determinations of school integration effectiveness and expresses a value which represents the average proportion white in schools.

Increased transportation costs were absorbed by the local school board. Additional implementation funding has been secured

plans that consider parent opinion. Some research indicates that much school reform has ignored the changing needs and structure of American families, making reform ineffective (Jackson and Cooper, 1989). A number of studies reminds interested readers that, above all else, parents prefer to send their children to a school close to home (Sandler and Kapel, 1989; Rossell and Glenn, 1988; Jones et. al., 1987; Darling-Hammond and Kirby, 1985).

If choice plans are to succeed in promoting educational excellence through a "pseudo" free market strategy that does not intensify inequity and segregation, then parents, as consumers, will play a key role in determining how future schools will be designed. Educators, as suppliers, will be required to provide distinctly unique choice options and quality service in order to maintain clients. Should administrations fail to consider this, choice plans face an ominous future, much as other reforms have done.

THE EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH PLAN

The East Baton Rouge Parish Plan has two major components: 1) site-based management returns a portion of the authority for assessment and decision making to persons directly involved with individual schools and 2) enhancement programs provide a vehicle for parental choice and student recruitment in order to improve the system's racial balance. The controlled choice plan allows some students, based on "sending school/receiving school" racial compositions, to choose from among 43 participating schools that offer specialized programs or enhanced curriculums.

through a variety of resources, including school/community/business partnerships and state and federal grants. However, some schools have experienced frustrating difficulty in their search for sponsors or resources. A few enhanced programs have been curtailed by this lack of financial support.

Schools' ability to attract students to programs varied considerably as shown in Table III. However, some schools were limited in the number or race of students that they were allowed to accept and many were not free to leave their "home" school.

TABLE 2.
Change Enrollment/Interracial Exposure Coefficient
School Years 1985-86 through 1989-90

YEAR	BLACK ENROLLMT.	% CHANGE	WHITE ENROLLMT.	% CHANGE	%WHITE	Smw
1985-86	13669	*	8505	*	38.36	.32
1986-87	13917	1.81	8178	-3.84	37.01	.31
1987-88	14234	2.28	8023	-1.90	36.05	.30
1988-89	15111	6.16	8002	- .26	34.58	.28
1989-90	15789	4.49	8522	6.50	35.07	.29
			Change Before Redesign			
1986-87	248		-327		-1.26	-.01
1987-88	317		-155		- .96	-.01
			Change After Redesign			
1988-89	877		- 21		-1.47	-.02
1989-90	678		520		.49	.01

Source: East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Dept. of Data Processing

TABLE 3.
1989-90 Pilot School Application Totals

School	Applications
Audubon	179
Bakerfield	77
Banks	19
Broadmoor	140
Brookstown	27
Brownfields	316
Cedarcrest-So.	71
Dalton	36
Delmont	3
Dufrocq	1
Forest Heights	74
Glen Oaks Park	11
Goodwood	68
Greenbrier	174
Harding	7
Highland	119
Howell Park	98
LaBelle Aire	203
Lanier	14
LaSalle	101
Merrydale	13
North Highlands	7
Park	64
Park Forest	90
Polk	174
Progress	1
Red Oaks	64
Ryan	3
Sharon Hills	54
Tanglewood	163
Villa Del Rey	130
White Hills	128
Baker Middle	88
Capitol Middle	8
Crestworth Middle	7
Kenilworth Middle	95
Park Forest Middle	123
Broadmoor High	284
Capitol High	3
Glen Oaks High	32
McKinley High	10
R E Lee High	68
Woodlawn High	54

Source: East Baton Rouge Parish School System, Dept. of Data Processing: Pilot Student Maintenance File

Because the system's choice plan must maintain or improve racial balances, design and implementation of successful programs in strategic locations is important to future planning.

Prior to development of programs, parents were surveyed to determine the kind or content of programs most appealing to them or most critical to students' interests or needs. The survey asked parents to choose the option that they felt was most needed. The majority of respondents indicated a need for improvement in the areas of math/science. Many enhanced curriculums were, therefore, developed to respond to that need. However, schools with math/science programs have not been particularly successful in attracting students.

The Redesign Team and the Restructuring Committee recognize that other factors influence parents' choice of schools. However, predicting how schools and programs will fare in the next cycle is not simple. This exploration was designed to assess possible criteria used by parents in their school selection process. The researcher will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What factors influence parents' selection of schools?
2. Do factors such as race and socioeconomic level impact choice factors?
3. How has the Redesign program impacted parental involvement?

METHODOLOGY

Upon completion of the first nine week period of school, a stratified sample of 8 pilot and 8 nonpilot schools, with a total enrollment of approximately 9000 students, was selected for

participation. Each group contained six elementary schools (grades K-5), one middle school (grades 6-8), and one high school (grades 9-12). School administrators were asked to distribute a parent survey that had been developed to assess criteria used in parents' school selections.

The survey (see A-1) asked respondents to rank order eight indicators of school choice developed by the author. Parents ranked location, school policy, reputation, leadership, distance, physical facilities, extracurricular activities and school program from most important (1) to least important (8) in school choice consideration. In addition, open-ended questions provided parents an opportunity to include other criteria that might influence their choice of schools.

Parents were asked to provide some brief demographic information, to estimate the number of visits they made annually to their childrens' schools and were asked to rate the school their children presently attended. Respondents were asked to return completed forms to school administrators for collection.

One high school, the non-pilot school selected, declined participation. Another site was randomly selected and agreed to distribute surveys. Of the 8700 surveys that were distributed to schools, approximately 7500 were actually distributed to parents (two schools failed to distribute or return surveys). Of those distributed, a total of only 1937 were returned, 1899 which were usable. Some of the surveys returned were incomplete and some respondents completed the rank order exercises incorrectly. The

completed surveys represented only 39%. The poorest return rate occurred at the high school level. Parents of elementary students far exceeded parent respondents from the middle and high schools. In addition, the sampling included schools clustered by the 1981 court order, zoned schools (neighborhood schools) and magnet schools.

Based on demographic information voluntarily provided by respondents, although response rate was approximately 39%, the sample was racially and socioeconomically balanced (53% nonblack/ 47% black; 52% pay lunch/48% free and reduced lunch recipients).

ANALYSIS OF DATA

A factor analysis revealed that of the eight variables outlined in the rank ordering, location accounted for the greatest percent of variation. The Maximum Likelihood Analysis showed that the eight variables loaded onto three main factors. They indicated that the primary consideration for parents in school selection were based on: 1) location in relation to their homes, 2) the "face value" or public perception of a school and 3) the qualifications and abilities of the leader and his/her staff at the school. These factors accounted for only 48% of the variance (r=.69). Open ended responses identified teachers and/or staff as being the most important feature of a school. Racial composition was only mentioned occassionally. However, future research should probably consider racial balance of a school as a factor, based on previous research and cursory investigations of enrollment data.

Although 96% of parents reported being satisfied or very

satisfied with the schools that their children presently attend, only 56% of those parents replied that they would choose the school. When parents were asked why they would or would not choose the school that their children presently attend, they replied 38% of the time that distance from home was the major consideration.

Many times parents lauded schools with praise but admitted that they would not choose the schools because of the distance factor. Typical responses included "No, my son has a one and one half hour bus ride", "I would have chosen the school nearest my home" and "No, I disagree with the concept of bypassing four elementary schools to get to the one my child has been assigned."

The second most frequent response for choice was the quality of previous experience with the school (previous grade levels, other siblings or family members) which accounted for 17% of responses. Other considerations such as safety, reputation and special programs accounted for less than 10% of responses.

Although parent consensus expressed a sincere conern for educational quality, the definition of quality was defined in vague and varied ways. Some descriptions included "variety in learning," "creative learning methods that motivate students," "leadership and competence," "well rounded education," "teachers that are caring and take time with students," "provision of thought provoking material and stimulating learning," and others. This indicates that programs must demonstrate their uniqueness and quality in concrete ways, what Chenoweth labeled symbolic distinctions.

When data are examined for differences due to race or

socioeconomic factors (measured by participation in federal lunch program), differences were small and not significant. The only exceptions were in response to questions used to determine the amount of parent participation at schools. As would be expected, blacks and/or low socioeconomic groups reported an inability to visit and participate at their child's school due to lack of transportation much more than whites and/or higher socioeconomic groups. This probably helps to account for the difference in parental involvement as measured by number of visits to schools: blacks had a significantly lower average number of visitations to schools. Of the respondents that estimated number of visits to school in a year, 84% of white parents reported attending 5 or more times while only 66% of black parents reported the same number.

Parents of non-pilot school students reported visiting schools 5 or more times much more often than the pilot group, providing little evidence for demonstrating that parent participation has increased by pilot school involvement. However, the non-pilot group had a higher average SES and had a higher number of white respondents which was not controlled. Information that will be collected on audit summaries in the spring may be more useful in determining Redesign's impact on parent involvement.

A majority of respondents were aware that school advisory councils were in place at the school. Non-pilot respondents were less knowledgeable than pilot school respondents (only 49% knew of SAC's in place at school as opposed to 62% in the pilot group). However, this might be due to the newness of councils in non-pilot

schools, having just established advisory councils prior to the opening of school this year.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

An examination of this data indicates that location and distance of schools will remain strong factors in school selection. Specialized enhancements such as Attention Deficit Disorder and Dyslexia programs will be least affected by this if enrollment data for 1988-89 and 1989-90 serves as a valid indicator.

Because "face value" information, or public perception of schools, appears to be an important choice factor, marketing strategies could help some schools overcome initial attraction problems if these techniques emphasize caring staff, unique environment and outstanding leadership. However, schools should not expect to attract students from a wide radius without highly specialized programs or dynamic leaders, indicating that some enrollment restrictions will necessarily remain in place to avoid a return to single race schools in specific locations.

Parents strongly expressed the importance of principal and staff as a factor in choice of schools. Marketing strategies often fail to highlight the people that are involved in implementing a successful program. School board policy provides principals with the power to interview and select candidates for school positions. Schools that have outstanding programs and leadership often attract and secure the most capable personnel. This could contribute to an inequitable empowerment of schools in a "market" environment.

The researcher suspects that racial compositions of schools

is an important factor to parents, although the survey did not examine this. Because of the sensitivity of the issue, the researcher did not expect parents to be forthright in their attitude about race. A significant correlation was found between percent white of participating schools and the number of applications received by the schools. Future investigations are planned to include this factor, possibly using a discriminant function analysis.

There was little evidence to support different selection factors when parents were identified by race or socioeconomic status. All parents seem to want is a quality education and staff at schools that are not inconveniently or undesirably located. However, parent responses were not specific enough to provide any succinct definitions of their perception of quality education. It appears, perhaps, to be a function of how successful their children are in a given school, indicating a need to continue to individualize instruction as practically as possible.

Parent support is not greater in Redesign schools, according to this survey. This is logical since some of the nonpilot schools are, in fact, neighborhood schools where parent involvement remains high. Distance and socioeconomic factors do influence parent participation according to respondents. The more important question addressing how Redesign has improved site participation at individual schools will be better answered by performance audit data analyzed over time.

The Redesign Plan of East Baton Rouge Parish has stimulated

creativity in curriculum offerings, leadership and financing. Preliminary evaluations indicate positive feelings from parents, students and teachers in pilot schools (Knight, 1990). However, as the program expands to include an additional 18-20 schools in the upcoming year, the board will need to expand assistance to schools that do not fare well in attracting students. It is not as simple as Mr. Womack and others would think. The students served by less capable schools must attend somewhere and the most popular schools are operating with enrollment figures that meet or exceed maximum capacity. The students that remain in disabled schools are entitled to quality education as well. All families must be provided with equal opportunity for selection and local boards must defend that right. If they do not, then federal and state safeguards will continue to be necessary and site-based management will have to operate under the restrictions created by them.

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School:_____ Pilot:_____ Nonpilot:_____

SCHOOL CHOICE INDICATORS
Parent Survey

This survey has been developed in an attempt to identify factors that parents are most concerned with in choosing a school for their children. Please rank the following considerations from most important (1) to least important (8) based on your opinion. **PLEASE GIVE EACH OF THE ITEMS ONLY ONE NUMBER, FROM 1 TO 8.**

_____Location (pleasant, safe, attractive, spacious)

_____School program (instruction, athletics)

_____Reputation (recommended by friends, family)

_____Leadership (principal, faculty)

_____Extra-curricular facilities (sports, fine arts)

_____School policy (discipline, student requirements)

_____Distance from home

_____Physical facilities (structure, recreation areas, classroom size)

If there are other reasons you would have for choosing a school for your child to attend, please describe them:

Why is your child attending his/her current school?

_____This is the school to which he/she was assigned.

_____We choose this school because of the pilot program.

_____Other (please specify).

How long has your child attended this school? _____

If you had a choice, would you have chosen this school? (Please tell briefly why or why not?)

We would like for you to complete the following information in order for us to have an idea about the parents who responded to this survey. We would like for you to complete as much of the information below as possible. **WE ARE NOT INTERESTED IN INDIVIDUAL PARENTS. THERE WILL BE NO SPECIFICALLY IDENTIFYING INFORMATION ABOUT YOU OR YOUR CHILD.** However, you may leave items blank if you so desire.

Is there a school advisory committee at your child's school?

_____yes _____no

Does your child pay for his/her lunch or is he/she assigned to free or reduced lunch?

_____pay _____free _____reduced

Race: Asian _____ Black _____ Caucasian _____ Other _____

During the school year, about how many times do you come to school for programs, parent-teacher conferences, PTO meetings, etc.? _____

If you are seldom able to visit the school your child attends, what are the major reasons?

If you were to name the single most important feature of a school, what would it be?

In general, how satisfied are you with the school your child attends now?

_____very satisfied

_____satisfied

_____not satisfied

_____very unsatisfied

WE WOULD LIKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO INTERVIEWING PARENTS. IF YOU **WOULD BE WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED,** PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

Name_____

Address_____

_____

Daytime Telephone_____ Evening Telephone_____